

# Special Session

<b>Agenda Item #</b>	1
<b>Meeting Date</b>	2 July 2007
<b>Prepared By</b>	Sara Anne Daines HCD Director
<b>Approved By</b>	Barbara Matthews City Manager

<b>Discussion Item</b>	Appointment of Ms. Anne Becker as Takoma Park Poet Laureate
<b>Background</b>	<p>The Arts and Humanities Commission has forwarded the name of Ms. Anne Becker, for consideration by the City Council as the new Poet Laureate for 2007-2009. If appointed, Ms. Becker would follow Mr. Don Berger who was selected as the City's first poet laureate in 2005 and served through June 2007.</p> <p>The Takoma Park Poet Laureate program, established by Resolution of the City Council in May 2005, honors the achievements of a local poet and is designed to provide literary leadership in the community. The designation of a poet laureate is intended to not only support and promote Takoma Park's poets but to stimulate interest in poetry among residents of the city, to encourage young and old to strive for greater expressive abilities, and to encourage wider appreciation of poetry and literature. The selected individual serves for a period of two years. Their responsibilities include the development of a project that promotes poetry and writing, and appearances at a variety of public service venues.</p> <p>To be considered for appointment, an individual must be a resident of Takoma Park. He or she must be an active practitioner, a published poet who has demonstrated achievement over an extended time period, recognized by the literary community, and someone who has been engaged in teaching or public speaking or otherwise involved in the community.</p> <p>The Arts and Humanities Commission, having solicited nominations for poet laureate from the community, has forwarded its recommendation that Ms. Becker, a published poet, teacher and former producer of literary audio cassettes and radio programming, be appointed as the community's new poet laureate. If appointed, Ms. Becker would host a series of poetry workshops for adults, school aged children and teens, adults and children together, and for the residents of the Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. The results of these workshops would be compiled and published as a community poetry anthology. A copy of Ms. Becker's nomination and resume are attached.</p>
<b>Policy</b>	"To expand public awareness of, involvement in, and access to the arts and arts opportunities and to create an environment which promotes interaction, dialogue, discussion and lasting relationships between artists and the public."
<b>Fiscal Impact</b>	The Poet Laureate will receive a \$1,000 stipend from the Arts and Humanities Commission's FY08 budget.

<b>Attachments</b>	1. Resolution appointing Ms. Anne Becker as Takoma Park Poet Laureate 2. Anne Becker Nomination
<b>Recommendation</b>	To approve the proposed resolution
<b>Special Consideration</b>	

Introduced by:

**CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND**

**Resolution 2007 -**

**RESOLUTION APPOINTING  
THE TAKOMA PARK POET LAUREATE**

**WHEREAS,** the Takoma Park Poet Laureate program was established in May 2005 as a means of honoring the achievement of a local poet, while encouraging young and old to strive for greater expressive abilities and creating a wider appreciation of poetry and literature; and

**WHEREAS,** a poet laureate is a symbol of the important role the arts play in our civic life and creative expression and can be a source of pride and public pleasure for all Takoma Park residents.

**WHEREAS,** the Arts and Humanities Commission, after careful consideration, has forwarded for Council approval, its recommendation for the appointment of Ms. Anne Becker, a respected poet and a resident of Ward 2, as Takoma Park's new Poet Laureate.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND** that Ms. Anne Becker is hereby appointed Takoma Park Poet Laureate for a two-year period beginning July 1, 2007 and ending June 30, 2009.

Adopted this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of July 2007.

**ATTEST:**

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Jessie Carpenter  
City Clerk

March 23, 2007

Takoma Park Arts & Humanities Commission  
c/o Sara Ann Daines  
7500 Maple Ave.  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Dear Commissioners:

Enclosed is a packet of material to support my nomination as poet laureate of Takoma Park, including a vita, short biographical note, and sample poems.

Having lived in Takoma Park at various times since the early 50's, and most recently now for over twenty-seven years on Elm Avenue, I would consider it a privilege to serve as poet laureate of this corner of the world where I first came to real consciousness (my earliest memories are of playing on the banks of Long Branch, going to the Flower and Takoma Theatres, spending my allowance at Packett's Pharmacy and Woolworth's on Flower Avenue). As an adult, many of my poems have been composed and refined while walking the path along Sligo Creek.

If chosen I would like to offer a series of community poetry workshops for adults, school-age children and teens, for adults and children together, and for patients at the Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. Three 1 & 1/2 hour sessions for each group (school children to be divided into 8-11 year olds, middle schoolers, and high school age; the child/adult group would most likely consist of young children and their adults) will offer a solid introduction. I believe that hands-on experience, the opportunity to try writing poetry, helps build a deeper appreciation for this art. The goal of these workshops will be to compile an anthology of the community's work.

I also believe it would be a good idea to create a poetry committee to involve directly the many fine poets in our community in implementing and continuing a variety of activities such as collaborations between poets and visual artists (as Stephanie Ney is doing now), but also including dancers and musicians; the reading series, poetry in public places; etc. This would help to provide continuity as poet laureates change over the years.

Sincerely,



Anne Becker

cc: JoAnn Thacker

Anne Becker is a writer, teacher and former producer of literary audiocassettes and radio programming. Her book *The Transmutation Notebooks: Poems in the Voices of Charles and Emma Darwin* was published by Forest Woods Media in 1996. Becker's poems have appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *Washington Jewish Week* and other magazines. Presently, she teaches in the Poets-in-the-Schools program and at the Writer's Center in Bethesda, Maryland. She also provides poetry tutorials for adults, teens and children. Over the past five years she has developed a special poetry workshop, *Writing the Body*, for those who have experienced illness, either as patients or caregivers.

For over fifteen years, she was Senior Producer of Watershed Tapes, recording cassettes of more than 50 major American and international poets reading their work, including Louise Bogan, William Carlos Williams, Jean Valentine, Czeslaw Milosz, Joseph Brodsky, and Ruth Stone. She also produced segments for several series of literary radio programs that aired on 250 stations nationwide. For the Lannan Foundation, Becker developed prototypes for a series of audiotape readings by and interviews with contemporary poets.

Her work often combines science with poetry. She has lectured at the University of Connecticut on the nature of scientific thought and at the Corcoran School of Art on aspects of the history of science and technology. Awards include the Maryland Heritage Poetry Award and a Fellowship in Poetry from the Maryland State Arts Council. Her poems have been translated into Spanish and she has translated from Spanish and Russian into English. Becker received her Masters degree from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University. She lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, with her husband and son.

## In the Dreamtime

*--although a time without sleep  
there being no work from which to rest--*

a tiny gorge, an abyss vast  
as a grass blade or a thorn  
(as if cut by fish or bird bone)  
first divided the world.  
A mighty trickle, slight torrent,  
seeped through this fissure,  
rushed slowly between velvet  
banks blanketed by moss  
so fine its filaments glowed  
translucent green, burning,  
the raw color of spring.  
And there we were: dreaming--  
not sleeping--the first people,  
like ants, scuttling under mayflower,  
violet, squill. Engineers arranging  
earth grain by grain. Our legs  
thin as whiskers, our arms antennae  
as if we were blind. Perhaps we were--  
most likely we were, but of course,  
we didn't know it if we didn't know  
words for "eyes," for "sight."  
What we knew was color, the taste  
of color: the crisp, moist  
savor of blue, green's fresh  
bitterness, bright spicy snap  
of red. And yellow, pale  
yellow, almost ivory or pearl,  
it coated our lips like cream.  
And sienna, taste of clay, would become  
crust of bread. The soft, summer  
night air, chocolate. But this was the time  
before "bread," before "chocolate," before  
"cranberry," unctuous, sour,  
when Dreamtime's larder stocked  
milk, bee juice, pulverized seeds,  
acorn-cap baskets oozing vermillion fruit.  
We opened our mouths, our pink  
tongues wriggled like worms,  
the earth's food slithered down  
our purple throats, filled our bellies

until we leaked, until we lay,  
beached, like overturned boats,  
hulls basking in the heat.  
And then we played, water our instrument,  
our toy. We drenched everything we touched,  
our green hose no bigger than a straw,  
we sprayed. No longer blind we watched  
rainbows cascade in drops against the sky.  
Let the rain's cold kiss claim us as kin.  
Then the songs came, line after  
line, we reeled them out of our throats,  
the notes teaching us their tune,  
our tongues tasting words awake.  
And how ripe, golden, we did sing.

*On my way home I see mushrooms sprouting  
up through the lawn.  
They are fingers, stretching for help, of someone  
who has long sobbed to herself in the darkness  
down there.  
We are the earth's.  
from "Sketch in October," by Tomas  
Tranströmer*

Good-bye. good-bye. for the rest of the summer. As the grass and the knotweed continue to grow higher and higher. Wild grapevine and porcelainberry choke the trees and ants burrow in rotting cushions. The elephant strikes out in panic. Thyme decides it's had enough rain. Butterfly search for nectar so they can lay their eggs and die.

We have played together until this noon of summer, its high point. its peak. Now we each go singly about our harvesting and planting the cool fall crops. although gold finch have stolen the seeds.

So many of us crowd the surface of the earth, jostling and stinging; whining and giggling. Because our feet stand on it, our roots clutch it, because we lay our concrete and asphalt, because we move and crumble great stones, barely lifting a finger, a rootlet, we think we own it. Because we can raid her stores buried deep. Because we can throw ourselves into the sky and land on her back without bruising our bodies, we believe we possess her.

Because we thought it possible to leave home.

We will meet here again in the fall.



## Awakening

The body, awake in the quiet light of early morning, watches—no, listens with its eyes—as light touches rice paper blinds, the scuffed wood of the floor. The tender blotch of shadow twitters like leaves. Listens with its skin as the satin air rolls in minute waves across the arches of the cheek and stem of the nose, ruffles the hairlets of the upper lip, swept over tiny bubbles of sweat.

Still, the good body, that woke and slept, day after day, over half a century, wants to crawl back to its bed. To pull puffy covers up over itself. Extinguish light. Foil gravity. Nestle down into cotton, spun and woven, fibers fine, white white like cloud but flowing with weight like water over itself, chilled by that early air. To warm itself and rest—still—to curl into its soft nest

so that its legs no longer need to hold it up. Its arms refuse doing, perform no gesture but twine themselves around breast and shoulder, the hands, barren, will burrow down into the gorge of the chin, or tuck up inside tufted armpits. It wants to have to do nothing. Its feet lightly floating one on the other, weightless like *chinchilla*, or *kitten*. Bones held together by hair. Each knob and

bulge finds a hollow to insert itself, like a puzzle. Mound surrounded by valley. Eyes blanketed by lids. Ribs kneading the dough of the belly as breath billows through lungs and slips

out of the shaft of the nose. At the core,  
custardy brain, blue-gray, settling down  
at the back of the eyeballs, over the dome  
of the palate, behind the throat-cavern.  
And the fibrous heart, muscular,  
gargling, relaxes its fist.